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ABSTRACT

The elementary secondary curriculum in the United States could benefit from redefining the arts as a discipline to be interwoven into the school's curriculum. Four essays in this issue explore the question of the arts in education. John Holdren comments in "Will the Band Play On?" that music educators must stress the serious study of music as its own language and include instruction in performance as well as in music appreciation. Dennis Gray maintains in "Excellence as Juggernaut" that, with the advent of "excellence in education," there has been increased lobbying from each of the disciplines for inclusion in the curricula. In order to adequately teach all the disciplines, restructuring of schools is necessary. Teachers must spend more time involved in serious discussion of ideas and issues with fewer students. Related disciplines should be integrated--in both curriculum content and in instructional methods. Eight high schools in Los Angeles are merging history, literature, and the arts in a pilot program. Students will find themselves learning about a single period of history in several courses. Elliot W. Eisner says, in "Why Arts Are Basic," that a virtue of an effective arts education is helping children learn from what they see, hear, and touch. The document concludes with a review, by John Holdren, of the book, "Within the Walled Garden: The Story of a School," by Charles Merrill. (SM)

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What Place for the Arts?

Emerging Disciplines

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Reshaping—Rethinking—the Curriculum

Arts Education as Basic

SO 018 460

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Basic Education

Volume 31, No. 9 May 1987

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STAKING A CLAIM

Lip service to the arts is easy. Why, yes, of course they are part of a basic education. Now what?

How do we defend such an assertion with anything more than vague, self-defensive shrugs? Just as important, how do we propose that schools should make the "fit," wedging the arts in a meaningful way into the curriculum? For that matter, which arts? This issue of *Basic Education* addresses some of these questions.

Fashionable rhetoric these days insists that the arts are practical: they develop in children whole areas of cognitive and creative abilities that will be crucial if we are to meet the economic challenges of the Orient in the twenty-first century. Howard Gardner with his "Project Zero" at Harvard has gone far in broadening our understanding of intelligence, indeed insisting on the critical reality of multiple forms of that slippery commodity.

And Charles B. Fowler, in *Basic Education: Issues, Answers, and Facts*, has argued that it "is doubtful whether this nation can remain the world's leader in technological inventiveness without investing in the creative development of its young minds."

No argument here. But as I recently wondered aloud with regard to the liberal arts, are these really the grounds on which we wish to stake our claim? Perhaps yes, in the political battle with the unconverted, with those principals and parents and schoolboard members who see the arts as an elitist frill, who insist on quantifiable, preferably economic evidence to catch their eye.

Nevertheless, we need never be bashful about making such a claim as Ernest Boyer's in *High School*:

> From the dawn of civilization, men and women have used music, dance, and the visual arts to transmit the heritage of a people and express human joys and sorrows. They are that means by which a civilization can be measured. It is not accidental that dictators, who seek to control the minds and hearts of men, suppress not just the written and spoken word, but music, dance, and the visual arts as well. . . .

Making the fit, integrating the arts into the curriculum, is a far leap beyond acknowledging their value. No other discipline in elementary and secondary education has changed and developed so dramatically in the last twenty years. At least in theory. The reality in most schools, at least those that devote any time to the arts at all, remains as John Goodlad describes in *A Place Called School,* where "arts programs . . . go little beyond coloring, polishing, and playing—and much of this goes on in classes such as social studies as a kind of auxiliary activity rather than as art in its own right."

Yet such recent programs as Discipline Based Art Education, supported by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, create a structure through which children can develop a range of knowledge about the history of the arts as well as critical skills to appreciate them and practical skills to perform them. As Elliot Eisner, a contributer to these pages for the first time, has discussed elsewhere, such a structure of understanding may well be a necessary platform for the creative leap of enjoying art, for experiencing its magic.

We're not talking about tacking on an extra period of band to the school day, but of interweaving another discipline as coherent and as sequential in building knowledge and skills as English and math and science. Dennis Gray confronts some of the implications of that challenge.

But perhaps we can convince the schools that by recognizing a coherent discipline that embraces the different arts, some of the barriers separating other disciplines can be breached. For how can one understand the history of Beethoven's dedication of his third symphony, the Eroica, without knowing of Napoleon's betrayal of republican ideals? What sense does Picasso's Guernica make in a historical and moral vacuum?

The curriculum as a whole may well benefit from forced redefinition and, of necessity, a greater perception of shared topics, shared goals.

—DHL

WILL THE BAND PLAY ON?

by John Holdren

The kids know the cue: when Bill Sano pounds the old upright, thirty fifth-grade voices break into a raucous rendition of Irving Berlin's "This Is the Army, Mr. Jones." Then it's on to "God Bless America." "And who introduced this song?" Sano asks. "Kate Sullivan," one boy cries, only to be hooted by his classmates, "No, dummy, Kate *Smith*!"

For Sano, that's the last of four Monday morning classes in which he, the Music Specialist for the Marblehead, Mass. elementary schools, connects music to topics the kids are studying in other classes. For the past few weeks it's been World War II for the fifth graders. But V-J Day has come, and Sano is off to lunch, then quickly to another school to teach two classes of first and second graders.

Each week Bill Sano shuttles between two schools to teach about 300 students across six grade levels. For a music teacher, he's one of the lucky ones. He sees students often and long enough to keep them singing. But what about music specialists in other districts who scurry among twice as many schools and students? What about the district with no music specialist where classroom teachers squeeze music somewhere between reading, math, science, recess, lunch, assemblies and announcements? These teachers can vary widely in musical competence; some of them, Sano observes, can't get through the first verse of "America the Beautiful." In such cases, he says, music appreciation collapses into "music depreciation."

To nobody's surprise, depreciating budgets are partly to blame. In a national survey of school music budgets, Polly Hansen reports in the *Instrumentalist* (August '86) a "continuing downward trend in public funding . . . over the past ten years." According to Hansen, music programs often suffer because "music is seen as an elective, a frill, not an academic necessity." But, she observes, even with tight budgets music teachers can enjoy "great

success" if they work with "administrators who *do* see music as an academic necessity."

Terrence Boylan is such an administrator. He is the principal of the Coffin School where Bill Sano teaches. Boylan sees music and the arts as "central to education." Before he sits down to talk with the visitor, he pops a tape into a cassette deck: the third movement of Dvorak's "New World" Symphony plays not-so-unobtrusively in the background.

Boylan believes in integrating music and the arts with other subjects. "Art is not isolated or singular," he says. So you'll find Bill Sano following the singing of "This Is the Army, Mr. Jones" with a flurry of questions: Who were the Axis powers? and the Allies? At another time, when the fifth graders were studying Japan, they wrote haiku poems and sketched pastel illustrations of their verses. Under Sano's direction, they composed sounds to accompany "choral speaking" of the poems. With the help of a local choreographer, the students transformed three poems into dances for a public performance accompanied by an exhibition of the illustrated poems. The Coffin School, Boylan says, will continue "to place special emphasis on the arts. After all, I never know who I have in this building. Leonard Bernstein at one time was a third grader."

It may seem ungrateful to ask more of a school that already devotes so much to the fine arts and music. But Coffin, like most American schools, has little to boast of in one area of music education: performance on a musical instrument. Beginning in third grade, optional instruction—a half hour per week—is offered in string and band instruments. But by fifth grade, only about one sixth of Coffin's students continue to practice an instrument. Even in this exceptional school, music remains more a matter of appreciation than of performance.

Appreciation is worthwhile but it's not enough, says Lyle Davidson, a professor at the New England Conservatory and a researcher with Harvard's "Arts Propel," a fledgling study of new ways to teach the arts. Davidson argues that the music appreciation approach—in which "listening is the principal activity" and music "is tied to a larger thematic unit"—teaches students "to think *about* the domain [of music] but not *in* the domain," not in terms of music as music. He suggests the shortcomings of this approach through an analogy: think of "a mathematics class that teaches the history of mathematics or the aesthetics of equations." Music, Davidson charges, "is increasingly becoming a spectator sport in this country."

In another country—yes, Japan—performance is emphasized, indeed required. As Diane Ravitch has reported, "beginning in the second grade children learn to read music," and "by the end of the sixth grade, every student plays at least two instruments."

Nobody is asking American schools to turn out a bunch of little Horowitzes and Heifetzes, but is it too much to ask for competence in musical performance? Judy Melillo, President of Massachusetts Music Educators, offers a qualified response: "So many other things are required in schools nowadays, like computer literacy. We know that most kids are not going to be musicians. But we need to educate them to be musically literate, so if they want they'll be able to join a choir or play in a band."

It would be nice to think that the ability to play in a band or just plink on the old church piano would be sufficient justification for music programs. But no. When facing school boards or appealing to booster organizations, teachers often feel compelled to justify music programs with non-musical rationales. The study of music, they say, can make scientists more creative problem solvers, or lawyers more precise writers. Some claims are more lofty: music makes us more human, it nourishes our souls. Some claims verge on hype: the study of music, one teacher says, "gives you all you need to succeed in the corporate boardroom: self-discipline, self-confidence, the ability to perform, the expectation to produce."

Non-musical justifications for the study of music "probably shouldn't be used," says John Mahlmann, Executive Director of the Music Educators National Conference. "Today," Mahlmann explains, "you don't have to sell music: there's music in elevators, in dentists' offices, everywhere. Instead you have to sell the serious study of music as a subject in and of itself, as its own language and way of knowing."

It may sound sentimental, but in a better world music teachers wouldn't have to do any selling. They wouldn't, like Bill Sano and others, have to scurry to make a living. They wouldn't feel compelled to hype their product. For all the justification they need, they could cite this simple rationale in the Japanese first-grade curriculum guide: that we should learn to appreciate and perform music in order "to make life bright and pleasant through musical experience."

John Holden is a Senior Associate of the Council for Basic Education.

EXCELLENCE AS JUGGERNAUT

by Dennis Gray

Education's great social engineering project in the 1980s is the excellence movement. Social engineering—the attempt to change the way people think and act—always has unexpected side effects. We're beginning to see the side effects of the excellence movement. Some are truly insidious. Take, for example, how the machinery of curriculum design has become like a trash compacter, ceaselesly laboring to compress ever more "content" into the same size container.

In order to keep or increase their share of education's resources and their place in the curriculum, the proponents of various school subjects have learned to marshall "proof" that without more of their subject in the curriculum students will surely fall short of excellence. Who would have predicted that four years after *A Nation at Risk*, one of its most notable offshoots would be skillful lobbying campaigns by the advocates of science, history, economics and the arts—to name but four subjects recently so affected? The arts can serve to illustrate some of the damaging side effects of the drive for excellence as well as how to avoid them by crumbling the arbitrary barriers between academic disciplines.

Drawn by the magnetic name of the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, a large assemblage of art educators gathered in Los Angeles last January for what may have been the apotheosis of lobbying for academic reform. A battalion of speakers and panelists, with the U.S. Secretary of Education heading the roster, armed the audience with every conceivable argument for the centrality of the arts in the curriculum. CBE's own Graham Down along with Ernest Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, were two speakers who brought cheering, applauding listeners to their feet by their rousing eloquence on the importance of the arts in a proper education.

Mind you, while Down and Boyer extolled the arts in general, Getty's agenda concentrated on the visual arts alone, which is certainly a common enough tactic in the excellence movement. And this is where we get to what can be insidious about effective lobbying for a single subject.

To CBE and to many people at the conference, what Getty wants is reasonable: schooling for all students that stresses more than producing art, schooling that also includes art history, criticism, and aesthetics. Getty calls this program Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) and has mounted a coast-to-coast campaign to gain acceptance of it. The program includes training for teachers, well-funded pilot projects, and surely the most handsome printed materials ever to explain an educational innovation.

For the sake of this discussion, set aside several pressing questions. Are there enough qualified teachers? If not, how do we get them? How much will it cost? And so forth. These are real and practical issues, to be sure, but set them aside for the moment.

Ask only whether schools could or should incorporate Getty's DBAE as a required, discrete, self-contained subject in an already-bursting curriculum for all students. This framing of the question makes explicit Getty's premise that art education should be part of *general* education, that is to say, basic education, not a restricted enterprise for a self-selected elite. In other words, Getty is not talking about "majoring" in art as might be done in a magnet program.

The curriculum is already full to overflowing.

As more material for the curriculum compacter, DBAE won't work. It won't fit; the curriculum is already full to overflowing. Addition is not practical or prudent, unless a school is seeking to become even more ludicrously obsessed with COVERAGE—the sin of multiple commissions. In most schools, the day will not stretch to accommodate "just a few more" isolated requirements. Yet DBAE sounds good to many teachers.

With no space for expanding the curriculum, choices (just say no) or compromises (mergers) are necessary. What to do?

Take a lesson from Ted Sizer. Less can be more, he says. Cover less; do more with it. Restructure schooling to make sure that teachers spend more time involved in serious discussion of ideas and issues with fewer students. This is one of the main principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools that Sizer heads. Applied to art, Sizer's advice has several consequences, the most important of which is that *related disciplines must be integrated*—in curriculum and in instruction—or the COVERAGE problem will worsen.

Some experiments are already underway. For example, eight high schools in Los Angeles are seeking to merge history, literature, and the arts in a pilot program supported by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Los Angeles Educational Partnership. The idea is catching on in other schools too. Teachers from participating disciplines collaborate in the design of the curriculum, reading lists, course syllabi, and lesson planning. In addition, they give common examinations and grade them collaboratively. One happy result is that students find themselves learning about a single period—say the Enlightenment, for instance—in several courses, rather than skipping to a different century solely because of moving from history class to literature. Working cooperatively requires teachers to talk with each other regularly and to abandon the imperialistic ambitions of single disciplines—or at least to moderate them. They concentrate instead on enabling students to see culture as it is, a seamless fabric of many threads and hues.

Schooling that integrates the humanities, as in the case of the Los Angeles experiment just cited, is no iron-clad defense against the tryanny of COVERAGE. State legislators, school boards, and curriculum designers can still create absurdly excessive demands for mentioning every topic that has a powerful lobby group. But programs that integrate the humanities at least raise the possibility of breaking the schools' addiction to COVERAGE and of cultivating a new habit of mind that insists on making time for critical thinking, reflection, and the discussion of ideas.

Dennis Gray is Deputy Director of the Council for Basic Education.

WHY ARTS ARE BASIC

by Elliot W. Eisner

Given the competitively tough world we live in, what serious claim can we make for the arts as part of a basic education? After all, institutions of higher education do not give them high priority for purposes of admission. Our ability as a nation to compete with Japan, Korea, West Germany, and other technologically advanced—or soon to be advanced—countries seems little affected by what arts provide. And as far as the good life is concerned, many Americans seem to be getting along just fine without contact with Corelli, Massaccio, I.M. Pei, or John Cage.

It is not altogether clear that the good life, whatever that might be, requires access to the fine arts. And even if it did, we must wonder whether the arts can be taught effectively in public schools. Can an institution not noted for its commitment to the development of sensibility and imagination do the arts justice, or will it succeed merely in dampening whatever latent interest students might possess? Can teachers who have not been steeped in the arts and for whom they are unimportant teach to children and adolescents what they themselves do not understand and find difficult to experience? Wouldn't children be better off left alone for some chance encounter with the arts when the ground is somewhat more fertile?

Perhaps the arts in our schools are precisely where they belong—a sideshow for most and center ring for a few. Yet this is an image of schooling that is lopsided and worse, indifferent to what humans should become and what they might be helped to experience. An artless school is an impoverished place reflecting a set of values that bodes ill for our society. Let me try to indicate why the arts ought to be a fundamental part of a basic education and what is needed if they are to become so.

First, consider the matter of sensibility—the manner in which we perceive and make sense of the world in which we live. The achievement of consciousness is a function

of the extent to which one becomes sensitive, responsive, or perceptive to the qualities that constitute that world. The particular proportions of a tree, the expressive character of a human stance, the structure and composition of a city scene, the interplay of counterpoint in both conversation and music: to make sense of any of these, to glimpse their richness, requires that we know how to see and know what to look for. In this way, the training of our sensibilities is one road to mature consciousness.

Another road is imaginatively transforming images glimpsed with the physical eye and seen with the sensibilities. The reconstruction of a visual image into an imaginative realization depends upon the subtleties, complexities, and richness that our perceptions—our *trained* perceptions—have made possible in the first place.

An inability to cope with diverse and conflicting visions about what is right, good, or beautiful is the surest path to tyranny.

What do the arts have to do with such achievements and of what moment are they in the grand and practical purposes of education?

If the arts are about anything, they are about refining such perceptions, of helping people replace for a moment the practical press of the immediate with attention to what can be seen if given only half a chance. A first virtue of an effective arts education is helping children learn to see what they look at, hear what they listen to, and feel what they touch.

A second virtue of effective arts education is to help students stretch their minds beyond the literal and rule-governed. So much of schooling is tied to the factual, to the certain, to the provable, to the algorithmic. Multiple-choice tests may very well stand for, both practically and metaphorically, the primary current mission of schooling. What a damning thought!

In the arts, choice is always multiple; the difference, however, is that there is rarely a single certain answer. Hence, when well taught the arts free the mind from rigid certainty. What could be more critical to any society

seeking multiple solutions to the myriad problems before it? And such processes are of central importance in developing in citizens the tolerance and taste for coping with the ambiguities and uncertainties of human affairs.

The larger point here is that the lessons one is taught in school contain both direct and indirect messages. One can certainly teach children multiplication tables and correct spelling. But in the process one also teaches them that there is, after all, one correct way to spell and one accurate way to compute. For these fields, of course, that is wholly appropriate. But when such messages dominate our school programs, the quest for certainty and the fealty to rule become an overriding lesson. What is the danger? I submit that an inability to cope with diverse and at times conflicting visions about what is right, good, or beautiful is the surest path to tyranny.

The arts also exemplify and develop an important form of literacy, the literacy needed to read and interpret the varied meanings of poetry, music, visual arts, and dance. One need not burn books to render them feckless; they need only go unread for a couple of generations. The absence of attention to the arts in our schools will result in an inability for most of our citizens to deal with more than "Wheel of Fortune," "As the World Turns," and "Dallas." After all, people "read" what they can. This brings us to another major aim of arts education: that through them children find meaningful access to their cultural heritage. Without such literacy that heritage itself will molder as skeletons in an unopened closet. The arts require a seeing eye in order to live.

Such virtues are not easily achieved, however. What will be necessary for the arts to become a reality in our schools? Allow me to suggest three important dimensions. Let us remember, first of all, that the priorities of the public schools are determined by the kinds of tests that are administered and, in a related vein, by the admissions policies of selective colleges and universities. If the arts are to gain any secure place in the school curriculum, assessment procedures both within the schools and for post-secondary admissions will need to be broadened to give the arts public credibility.

That is no small task. It is easy to develop mindless tests that reduce a knowledge and understanding of the fine arts to something trivial. The major task that confronts arts educators, as well as others concerned with the quality of education throughout our schools, is to develop methods through which genuine achievement can be made vivid.

A second factor that needs attention is a broader and deeper view of what counts as education. The Council for Basic Education has historically embraced a conception of mind, understanding, and education that is neither widely understood nor shared by the body politic. The arts have a central place in that conception. Yet what the public hears most about are those largely irrelevant test scores that so often create high-level anxiety about the quality of our schools. High or low, scores on inadequate tests reveal very little about what is educationally significant. A continued emphasis on "achievement tests" will, in my view, diminish rather than enhance the possibility of a broader and deeper approach to schooling in America.

Third, and finally, if arts education is to become a reality in schools not only will broader assessment procedures and deeper public understanding be necessary, programs that are educationally substantive must be developed and teachers who are capable of teaching the arts must be trained. At present, particularly at the elementary school level, we are in short supply of both.

While some progress is being made thanks to new sources of foundation support, a long road remains to be traveled. Without attention to the three factors I have discussed, meaningful arts education in American schools will remain unavailable for the many and an extra-curricular bonus for the few. Thanks both to developments in the field itself and to the overall educational reform movement, the time seems ripe for significant improvement in this long-neglected field. Should we fail, the arts will remain for most people an elitist pastime. With effective arts education, they can become a legacy that all enjoy.

Elliot W. Eisner is Professor of Education and Art at Stanford University.

WITHIN THE WALLED GARDEN

***The Walled Garden: The Story of a School*, by Charles Merrill. Rowan Tree Press (124 Chestnut St., Boston, MA 02108), 1982.**

Reviewed by John Holdren

Since the floodgates opened a few years ago, we've been up to our necks in sweeping reports and immodest proposals. In the deluge, one modest book was swept aside. *The Walled Garden*, subtitled "The Story of a School," is also the story of the author, Charles Merrill, who founded the Commonwealth School in 1958 and presided as headmaster until he retired in 1981. The man—a son of the Merrill in Merrill Lynch and Company—and the school enjoy privilege and plenty. Yet the book offers wisdom that extends far beyond the walls of one exceptional school.

Born wealthy, Merrill desires something wealth cannot buy: social justice. After the crash of 1929, his father quickly gained back the family fortune; young Charles was disappointed that his father "seemed to have no awareness of any need, in society, for basic change or even action."

Merrill's own desire for change and action eventually took shape in two Victorian brownstones a few blocks from the Boston Common. Here began the ambitious enterprise of running a school that would foster both the highest academic standards and the highest humane values—sometimes conflicting ideals, as Merrill would discover.

Merrill wanted his school to shape students who "out of native ability, hard work and good teaching would learn the skills to serve and lead society." The Commonwealth graduate who stays in Boston to teach Cambodian and Laotian refugees attests to the success of Merrill and his teachers. But, Merrill admits, the "bottom line" for many Commonwealth students "is careerism: in April, the elect are chosen for Harvard or Yale; the rejected trudge off to the University of Massachusetts." One mother tells Merrill, "I'd like to thank you for getting our daughter into Radcliffe. But I suppose that's the reason why we sent her to your school." The ideal of social justice remains in conflict with the reality of competitive self-interest.

Conflict, struggle and suffering find their way even into the walled garden of Merrill's privileged school. The walls are not intended to keep out what Merrill, quoting Keats, calls the "World of Pains and trouble." A young woman's suicide; riots during the Vietnam years; the bitterness of minority students against their privileged peers; Merrill's own bitterness in attempting to reconcile equity and excellence ("The Christ-like admissions director with a sense of guilt about a private school's privileges who fills his school with the insulted and the injured will create a place where *nothing* gets done"): Merrill's candid accounts of these and other struggles give his book far-reaching interest and relevance.

Without calling for excellence Merrill demands it. In characteristically salty prose, he requires the use of "precise words against the inarticulate idiocy of Youthspeak." He demands that students master a thoroughly "integrated body of knowledge." The current Commonwealth curriculum includes readings in the Bible, Shakespeare, Milton, Yeats, Dickens, Conrad, Faulkner, Homer, Sophocles, Herodotus, Chaucer, Dante, Moliere, Ibsen, Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, Tom Paine, Thoreau, Eugene Debs, Martin Luther King, Richard Wright, Chinua Achebe—and that's just a small sample.

Despite the rigorous requirements, Merrill believes that "education is liberation." He insists that students learn to think for themselves. A teacher should give students "the chance to ask *why*." A teacher should "force his students to think by standing against the Zeitgeist and ignoring the buzz words and trendy themes."

Merrill knows this noble ideal may be easier said than done. Public schools are subject to taxpayers, legislatures and school boards, private schools to those who pay tuition. Financial pressures are ideological pressures. Commonwealth is lucky to be able to stand against the Zeitgist: "Commonwealth's independence," Merrill plainly acknowledges, "has come partly because its headmaster's father was a wealthy man. That's that." Such candor is sobering. Merrill's account of what his exceptional school has achieved may enlarge our hopes for general reform, but his reminder of what allows that achievement restrains our sense of what is possible.

In a foreword to *The Walled Garden*, Theodore Sizer claims that "Merrill's voice is an important one among all the rhetoric of contemporary school reform." The voice is gruff, bitter, wry, hopeful, humane. It is a voice worth hearing.